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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000343

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: BABANGIDA CONFIDANT FORESEES POST-INAUGURATION
INTRIGUE

REF: 06 LAGOS 1429

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (S) Summary: In an April 28 conversation with the Consul General, Professor Ukande Damachi, confidant to former military head of state Ibrahim Babangida, said Babangida and many other former general officers allied to him were furious at the manner the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) swept the elections and would seek to undermine the new administration. Damachi said that Babangida and his cronies would not stir now but would tarry until the Umaru Yar'Adua administration took over on May 29. At that point, there is a strong possibility that Babangida would reach into his bag of dirty tricks to undermine the nascent administration. Damachi's description of the political scene indicated problems ahead for the new government. End summary.

Disgust and Frustration at the Conduct of the
Elections Characterize the Nigerian Polity

¶2. (S) In an April 28 conversation with the Consul General, Ukande Damachi, confidant to former military head of state Ibrahim Babangida, said Babangida was furious about the embarrassing conduct of the elections. A man with feelers in almost every major political camp, Damachi remarked there was unprecedented disgust and anger among the various opposition parties. These parties were meeting to plot strategy. However, he felt little would come out of the opposition harangue because they knew not how to electrify the crowd to the extent of turning a heretofore passive populace into an actively disobedient one.

Damachi Sees Post-Inauguration Intrigue

¶ 13. (S) Damachi painted a turbid picture of post-inauguration intrigue. In his scenario, Babangida would bide time until the new government of Umaru Yar'Adua took office and President Obasanjo finally left. Babangida wanted to see Obasanjo's exit in the worst way now, offered Damachi. This would relieve an albatross around Babangida's neck, because Babangida has been roundly criticized for being the author of Obasanjo's presidential ascent in 1999. In any event, Babangida was also wary of tangling with an Obasanjo whose wiles are a close match to Babangida's.

¶ 14. (S) The assumption percolating in Babangida's circle was the novice administration would be one of mediocre ability. It would likely stumble out of the gate, claimed Damachi. As the new administration flailed about, Babangida and Theophilus Danjuma, former Minister of Defense, would have an opening to foment discord, particularly in the military. If this scenario becomes how reality unfolds, then the Babangida group hoped for a lightning fast palace coup against a weak, isolated presidency. That would be followed by the institution of an interim government for six months to prepare for new elections. (Comment: After election, many, if not most, new administrations enjoy a honeymoon period where their miscues are attributed to inexperience and are forgiven. Not this time around. The Yar'Adua administration will be on probation. It will have to prove itself worthy. Instead of being forgiven, administration missteps will be seen as a sign of retribution for a stolen election. End comment)

Ibori and Buhari in Contact with Babangida

¶ 15. (S) Delta State Governor James Ibori, after heavily

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financing upwards of \$12 million for the national PDP convention, was angry that he was overlooked for the Vice-Presidency, averred Damachi. According to Damachi, Ibori stoked the April 21 attacks against Vice President-elect Goodluck Jonathan with the aim of eliminating him. Ibori broke bread and cut a deal with Warri-based Ijaw militants, in which he agreed to give them a share of local government power in exchange for a cessation of disruption activities against oil companies. A longtime associate of Babangida, Ibori was keeping in contact with Babangida on the above-mentioned post-inauguration scenario.

¶ 16. (S) Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari has been apprised of the gist of these brainstorming sessions, Damachi said. The question of who would head the interim government has been narrowed to either Buhari or Babangida, but most likely Babangida since Buhari would want to run for election, Damachi speculated. Damachi added that Babangida would be loath to preside over a temporary arrangement that would conclude in making Buhari the President in a more permanent setup.

Odili's Star Likely to Fade, and
Duke's Star Likely to Tumble

¶ 17. (C) Rivers State Governor Peter Odili, although delivering his wealthy state to the PDP on election day, has not been offered any post in the new government. Odili will return to private life, Damachi observed.

¶ 18. (C) Cross-River Governor Donald Duke still seethed from his rough treatment he received at the PDP convention. Damachi alleged that to force Duke to back down, Obasanjo showed the Governor a dossier of evidence of the questionable movement of funds overseas into deposit accounts and the purchase of real estate.

¶9. (C) Duke's political future would be ruined when people began to see the Tinapa project degenerate into a failure, Damachi postulated. Duke was already encountering problems with his successor, Governor-elect Liyel Imoke, on Tinapa and the strain it has placed on state coffers. Duke had leveraged so much money to fund Tinapa, the incoming governor would have trouble paying civil service salaries, let alone initiate any capital projects under his signature, averred Damachi. Imoke, not wanting to be blamed for Tinapa, might possibly appoint Duke as the special coordinator for Tinapa. That way, Imoke could keep Duke tied to Tinapa and avoid the blame for Tinapa's likely decline.

Comment

¶10. (S) Damachi gave a picture, if not completely accurate in its details, accurate in its general description of politicians simultaneously plotting with and against each other. What Damachi described was not actual plotting but could be deemed serious musing by some hefty characters. Because of whom they are their thoughts bear attention because, under propitious circumstances, they have the capacity to try to effectuate these thoughts.

¶11. (S) The transfer from one civilian administration to another on the federal and state level is something that has never happened here. In the best case there would be uncertainty, but that uncertainty has been exacerbated by the controversial electoral process. While Nigeria remains quiet and the call for mass protest is as yet unsuccessful, seasoned military politicians are biding their time. The post-inauguration period will be a trying time for the new government. End comment.

BROWNE